

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 LUANDA 01225 221653Z

53

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AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

CINCLANT

USCINCEUR

S E C R E T LUANDA 1225

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PFOR PINS MILI AO

SUBJECT: AIR FORCE COMMANDER ASSESSES ANGOLAN SITUATION

1. I TALKED ON AUGUST 21 WITH THE COMMANDER OF THE PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE IN ANGOLA, BRIGADIER GENERAL JOSE FERREIRA VALENTE, ABOUT THE CONTINUING DETERIORATION IN THE POLITICO-MILITARY SITUATION AND THE STEPS PORTUGAL PLANS TO TAKE TO TRY AND C
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WITH IT. VALENTE SAID THAT KEY OFFICERS IN THE ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT (AFM) NOW REALIZE THAT PORTUGAL CANNOT HOPE TO BRING THE WARRING ACTIONS TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE AND THAT INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES MUST BE BROUGHT TO BEAR IF A SOLUTION IS TO BE FOUND IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN TRYING THESE PAST FEW WEEKS TO COME UP WITH A USEFUL FORMULA, BUT EVERY AVENUE SEEMS TO BE A DEAD END.

2. EVEN IF THE PORTUGUESE WANTED TO CONTROL EVENTS IN ANGOLA,
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 LUANDA 01225 221653Z

SAID VALENTE, THEY COULD NOT DO SO. EACH OF THE LIBERATION

MOVEMENTS NOW HAS MORE TROOPS THAN THE PORTUGUESE. HE SAID THAT EACH MOVEMENT NOW HAS ABOUT 30,000 SOLDIERS, WHILE THE PORTUGUESE HAVE 24,000 ON PAPER AND FEWER THAN THAT IN REALITY. THE TROOPS OF THE MPLA AND FNLA ARE ALL ARMED AND WHILE UNITA IS RUNNING A POOR THIRD, IT HAS MANAGED IN RECENT WEEKS TO GET ADDITIONAL WEAPONS INTO THE HANDS OF ITS SOLDIERS.

3. WHILE I WAS TALKING TO HIM, VALENTE CONTINUED, HE WAS AWAITING A CALL FROM LISBON THAT WOULD TELL HIM WHETHER A DECISION HAD BEEN MADE TO PUT THE MATTER BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL. A NUMBER OF OFFICERS IN LISBON LONG HELD THAT TO DO SO, OR TO INVITE ANY INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION, WOULD SHOW THAT PORTUGAL WAS INCAPABLE OF HANDLING ITS PROBLEMS AND CONSTITUTE A BLOT ON THE NATIONAL HONOR. SUCH ATTITUDES IN THE FACE OF THE UNFOLDING TRAGEDY HERE HAVE BECOME RIDICULOUS AND THE FORMER PROPONENTS OF A PORTUGUESE SOLUTION NOW RECOGNIZE THAT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST BE ASKED TO TAKE A HAND. SOME SORT OF BIG POWER PRESSURE IS NEEDED TO BRING ABOUT A CEASEFIRE AND ESTABLISH A GOVERNING APPARATUS CAPABLE OF ASSUMING CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY ON NOVEMBER 11. IF THE CURRENT VIOLENCE CONTINUES FOR ANOTHER TWO WEEKS, HE CONCLUDED, THE MATTER WILL HAVE TO BE HANDED OVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS. THE PORTUGUESE ARE IN A DILEMMA; THEY CANNOT HAND OVER ANGOLA TO THE MPLA AND THEY CANNOT WALK OUT AND LEAVE CHAOS BEHIND. YET, THEY DO NOT HAVE THE MEANS TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEM.

4. VALENTE WENT ON TO TALK ABOUT EFFORTS INSIDE ANGOLA TO GET NEGOTIATIONS STARTED. MPLA PRESIDENT AGOSTINHO NOTO HAS BEEN TRYING TO GET TALKS STARTED WITH UNITA, BUT UNITA PRESIDENT JONAS SAVIMBI, WHO HAS ALWAYS SOUTHT SIALOGUE IN THE PAST, HAS BEEN RESISTING. ON AUGUST 19, VALENTE MANAGED TO GET UNITA PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL MEMBER JOSE N'DELE AND SECRETARY GENERAL NZAU PUNA TO THE PORTUGUESE AIR BASE IN NOVA LISBOA. THEY WERE TO FLY TO LUANDA TO MEET WITH MPLA PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL MEMBER LOPE DE NASCIMENTO. FOR REASONS STILL NOT CLEAR, SAID VALENTE, N'DELE AND PUNA REFUSED AT THE LAST MINUTE TO MAKE THE TRIP, SAYING ONLY THAT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF UNITA WOULD OPEN THE FOLLOWING DAY AND THAT DUTIES DID NOT PERMIT THEM TO TAKE THE TIME TO GO TO LUANDA. VALENTE WAS UNABLE TO EXPLAIN WHY NETO WAS SEEKING OUT UNITA WHEN MPLA FORCES WERE ATTACKING

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 LUANDA 01225 221653Z

UNITA AT SEVERAL POINTS. HE SIAD THE PORTUGUESE ARE KEEPING N'DELE AND NASCIMENTO IN REGULAR CONTACT THROUGH MILITARY RADIO FACILITIES, BUT THEIR CONVERSATIONS ARE STILTED AND ACCOMPLISH LITTLE.

5. VALENTE MOVED ON TO DISCUSS THE MILITARY SITUATION. HE SAID THAT FNLA WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO COME INTO LUANDA FOR TWO BASIC REASONS: FIRSTLY, THE APPROACHES TO LUANDA FROM CAXITO ARE

EASILY DEFENDED; AND SECONDLY, FNLA KNOWS WITH IS IN STORE FOR THEM IF THEY ATTEMPT TO TAKE LUANDA. THE MPLA FORCES AND ARMED IRREGULARS WOULD WREAK HAVOC ON THE FNLA TROOPS. I TURNED THE ISSUE AROUND AND ASKED ABOUT MPLA'S ABILITY TO DEFEND AGAINST AN ATTACK. VALENTE INDICATED CONTEMPT FOR THEIR MILITARY ABILITY AND SAID THEY COULD NOT STOP A DETERMINED ATTACK. AFTER DISCUSSING THIS ASPECT FOR SEVERAL MINUTES WITHOUT MUCH SUCCESS, I DECIDED HE WAS SAYING THAT BOTH MPLA AND FNLA FORCES ARE EQUALLY INCOMPETENT, BUT THAT MPLA HAS BETTER CADRES AND BETTER ARMS AND THAT FNLA WILL NOT MAKE A DETERMINED EFFORT FROM CAXITO. HE THINKS THE MAIN THRUST WILL COME FROM LUCALA. FNLA MAY ESCHEW A FRONTAL ATTACK ON DALATANDO (SALAZAR) IN FAVOR OF A DRIVE DUE SOUTH OF LUCALA ALONG DIRT ROADS, THEN WESTWARD TO DONDOHTO ISOLATE MPLA FORCES IN DALATAMBO. HE ALSO THOUGHT THAT FNLA MAY BE PREPARING TO MOUNT AND ATTACK FROM ITS BASE IN ZAIRE NORTH OF PORTUGALIA WHICH LIES IN THE NORTHEASTERN CORNER OF ANGOLA. ACCORDING TO VALENTE, FNLA STILL HAS A SIZEABLE NUMBER OF TROOPS IN THE BASE.

6. FNLA CANNOT GET DOWN THE CARMONA-CAXITO ROAD, HE CONTINUED. THEY TRIED ONCE IN RECENT WEEKS AND WERE DRIVEN BACK. WITH RESPECT TO LOBITO, VALENTE SAID THAT MPLA HAS 1,000 TROOPS THERE AND A LARGE SUPPLY OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION. STILL, THE POPULATION FAVORS UNITA AND HE WONDERED WHETHER MPLA COULD ESTABLISH PERMANENT CONTROL OVER THE CITY.

7. I ASKED VALENTE ABOUT THE INCIDENT IN WHICH UNITA/FNLA TROOPS HARASSED AHVONVOY OF PORTUGUESE SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS WHO WERE TRAVELLING FROM LUSO TO NOVA LISBOA. VALENTE HAD BEEN SENT DOWN TO NOVA LISBOA TWO DAYS EARLIER TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER. HE SAID THAT THE PORTUGUESE WERE TRAVELLING BY TRAIN FROM LUSO. AT A POINT SOME MILES EAST OF GENERAL MACHADO THE TRAIN HAD STOPPED. UNITA/FNLA FORCES CAME ALONG, UNHITCHED THE CARS

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 LUANDA 01225 221653Z

FROM THE ENGINE AND PROCEEDED TO ROB THE TRAVELLERS OF THEIR GUNS, CLOTHES, BAGGAGE AND MONEY. HE ADDED THAT UNITA WAS DOING THE SAME THING IN SOUTHERN ANGOLA TO REFUGEES FLEETING TO SOUTHWEST AFRICA. WHEREVER ONE LIBERATION GROUPS IS IN CONTROL OF AN AREA IT ACTS IRRESPONSIBLY, HE CONCLUDED.

8. A NUMBER OF MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS CAME UP. VALENTE SAID THAT HIGH COMMISSIONER GENERAL ANTONIO DA SILVA CARDOSO, A CLOSE FRIEND, WILL NOT BE BACK. NONE OF THE LIBERATION GROUPS HAS THE STRENGTH TO IMPOSE ITS WILL IN THE TERRITORY OF THE OTHER. THE BENGUELA RAILWAY IS NOT CUT, BUT IT MIGHT AS WELL BE BECAUSE MPLA CONTROLS THE WESTERN AND EASTERN TERMINALS AND UNITA HAS THE MIDDLE. EITHER SIDE CAN STOP TRAFFIC AT WILL, MANY EMPLOYEES HAVE FLED AND THOSE THAT REMAIN ARE UNWILLING TO GO OUT ON WHAT IS NOW HAZARDOUS DUTY. LUANDA'S BREADBASKET LIES

SOUTH OF DONDO AND IF UNITA/FNLA CAN PERMANENTLY CHOK OFF THE
FLOW OF FOODSTUFFS THE CAPITAL IS IN FOR SOME HARD DAYS. HE
SAID THAT MPLA IS PROBABLY GETTING A FORCE TOGETHER NOW TO TRY
AND RETAKE QUIBALA AND OPEN UP THAT ENTIRE REGION.
KILLORAN

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